

Chukas - D'var Torah

Making assumptions isn't always the wisest thing to do but I'm rather certain no one fasted Wednesday or today (I'm writing this early Friday morning).

Though this reality isn't surprising to most – it should be. There are 2 reasons recorded in *halacha* as to why a person should have fasted this past week.

Wednesday was the 9th of *Tammuz*. It was the day that the walls into the old city of *Yerushalayim* were breached during the destruction of the 1st Temple. We fast on 17th because of the breaching of the walls of the 2nd *Beit HaMikdash*.

Secondly, the *Magen Avraham* (*Siman* 580) is of the opinion that we should fast today for an entirely different reason. He writes that in 1244, under the order of King Louis the 9th (also known as Saint Louis), on the Friday of *Parshas Chukas*, 24 wagons of Jewish books were burned in Paris. Therefore, the Jewish people should fast on the Friday of *Parshas Chukas* to remember that awful day. We actually recite an entire *Kinnah* on *Tisha B'Av* morning commemorating this tragedy.

Parenthetically, in the book Constantine's Sword, the author notes that exactly 700 years later, in 1944, the Jews of Paris were rounded up and gathered in that very same plaza and sent to the concentration camps.

One might contend that *Yahadut* is a religion so focused on the past. We tap into our heritage, our traditions, our history and that very often defines the Jewish experience. We constantly recall the peaks and valleys of Jewish history and these memories animate Jewish life in rite and ritual.

We are an ancient religion – and some would say perhaps too focused on the past. I'm there must be data somewhere arguing that some younger people leave fold primarily because they feel that Judaism is too stuck in the past.

However, I couldn't disagree with that assertion stronger. In Future Sense, Jonathan Sacks makes the point twice in the final chapter where he identifies 4 unique characteristics of Judaism in the realm of the future. In his introduction to the chapter, he states, "Judaism is the supremely the religion of the not yet", explaining that in contrast to other civilizations, ours is the only civilization whose Golden Age is in the future.

As a people, we often remember the past, but it is only because of how the past defines our future.

A friend of mine has a tag line that accompanies every one of his e-mails and blog posts. It reads – "Obsessed with the Jewish Future".

We know this is true because the *Torah* implies it. Twice *Hashem* implores us to learn His *Torah*. We know that *Limud HaTorah* is the lifeblood of the Jewish People. It is the most fundamental and crucial *mitzvah* we have. It is the only *mitzvah* that some people attempt to devote every waking hour of each day to - *Talmud Torah K'neged Kulam*.

Interestingly, the *Torah* never definitively commands us to learn. The way *Hashem* orders us to learn is that we must teach *Torah* to our children.

1. *V'shinantem L'vanecha*
2. *V'limaditem Otam Et B'neichem*

In order to teach, we must have learned.

The next generation is included both times. Learning *Torah* is always couched in terms of passing down from one generation to the next.

Additionally, on *Pesach* night, when we stress our past more than any other time during the year, the commandment is also expressed in terms of one generation to the next – *V'higad'ta L'vincha*.

Every time we focus on the past, its only because of our obsession with the future of the Jewish people.

The book burnings were tragic – not exclusively for those in that generation but for what it could have meant to the perpetuity of Jewish learning and the Jewish people.

The breaching of the walls and ultimate destruction of the Temple was because we were nervous about the future of Jewish life. Could Judaism survive without it?

In *Parsha Chukas*, we see this idea unfold again.

In my estimation, the 2nd most (1st is *Akeidat Yitachak*) emotional and dramatic scene in *Chumash* is *Aharon's* death.

At the end of *Perek 20*, Moshe, Aharon and Elazar climb *Hor HaHar*, knowing that only two of the three will descend. Moshe is instructed to take off Aharon's *Bigdei Kehuna* and place the priestly garments upon Elazar who will assume the role of High Priest. They follow each command of *Hashem* meticulously. Moshe must even command Aharon to close his mouth, at which time his saintly *neschama* exits his body.

Rashi (20:26) notes that at this moment, Moshe stated the he too desires this death. What was it about this death that Moshe would embrace?

An earlier comment by *Rashi* (20:25) answers this question. Aharon was privileged to see his eldest living son assume a dignified position. Elazar was chosen, deservedly so, to follow in the path of his father. Aharon was able to tangibly see the success of his child.

Moshe was thinking about his future. What was he going to leave over to his kids? Who would they be? What would they become? He was focused on the future.

We live lives where we often become consumed by the moment, driven by what's happening now. But we know, intuitively that just as the best companies operate with 5 and 10 year plans, we should also. We must toggle between being consumed with the short term but ultimately obsessed with the long term view.

How will my actions and deeds effect who I become? How will they effect my children, my grandchildren, my community down the road?

Judaism isn't stuck in the past, rather it is infatuated with the future.